



# County of Fairfax, Virginia

To protect and enrich the quality of life for the people, neighborhoods and diverse communities of Fairfax County

## RABIES TESTING IN THE FAIRFAX COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT LABORATORY

### Method of Service Provision:

The laboratory accepts specimens submitted by Fairfax County Animal control and other public agencies from the surrounding region. An experienced team of microbiologists tests these specimens for the presence of rabies virus by the direct fluorescent antibody technique. Slides are prepared in the afternoon, fixed in acetone overnight, and stained and read the following morning. **All results are telephoned to the submitting agency immediately upon completion**, followed by a hard copy report in the mail. The submitting agency or designated agency rabies spokesperson are responsible for providing and interpreting test results to exposed individuals and animal owners.

- **Hours of Operation:** the laboratory accepts specimens from 8:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., Monday thru Friday. Emergency specimens may be accepted by special arrangement over weekends and holidays.
- **Contact Information:**
  - **Main Laboratory 703-246-3218**
  - **Emergency pager 703-213-8849**
- **Turnaround Time:** Specimens received before 3:00 p.m. on Monday through Thursday will be reported the following morning. Specimens received before 9 a.m. Friday will be reported same day. An after-hours or emergency telephone number must be provided for reporting positive results.
- **STAT Specimens:** In emergency situations, a special four-hour rabies test can be done if the specimen is received in the morning. Results are available at the end of the day. Microbiologists are available weekends and holidays by special arrangement for emergency testing if there is a case of human exposure to a wild animal or unvaccinated domestic animal.
- **Proficiency:** Members of the Fairfax rabies team have been trained at the Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services in Richmond, VA and at the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA. The laboratory participates in the Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene Proficiency Testing Program for Rabies.

### Fairfax County Health Department

Division of Laboratory Services

10777 Main Street, Suite 301, Fairfax, VA 22030

Phone (703) 246-3218 TTY 711 FAX (703) 591-3641

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/hd)



- **Fee Schedule FY 2006:**

- Rabies Test \$16.00
- Services are provided free of charge to Fairfax County Animal Control and to the towns and cities within Fairfax County

**Specimen Submission Criteria:**

- **Head removal and collection guidelines:** A live animal will not be accepted by the laboratory. The animal should be humanely euthanized without damage to the head. The head must be removed from the body and submitted intact for examination. Fairfax County Animal Control (703-691-2131) or any local veterinarian may be contacted for assistance in removing heads for submission. Head removal and collection guidelines available from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) at <http://vdhweb/epi/rabiesnew.asp>. See pages 14-16 of the Rabies Control Guidelines.
- **Heads only:** Because of limited storage space, the laboratory only accepts heads, unless the animal submitted is the size of a squirrel or smaller. Live animals are **never** accepted.
- **Fleas and Ticks:** The animal head must be thoroughly sprayed or dusted with a flea or tick killer prior to packaging for transport. This is particularly important on wild animal specimens to avoid exposing laboratory staff to vector-borne diseases.
- **Bats:** In numerous instances, bats euthanized with chloroform alone have “revived” in the midst of testing, needlessly endangering laboratory staff. All bats must euthanized with ½ -1 cc of Sodium Pentobarbital (intraperitoneal, IP) before being transported to the laboratory, and the method of euthanasia must be recorded on submission paperwork.
- **Submission Form:** It is critical to fill out the form completely and with enough pressure to insure all 5 copies are legible. Include an after-hours or weekend emergency contact for positive results. If multiple family members have been exposed, be sure to fill out “number of human exposures.” Also include the zip code or GPS coordinates of the “original location animal found” especially if they differ from animal collection site or owner information. The submission form should be in a separate sealed ziplock bag attached to secondary container of each specimen.
- **Packaging:** All specimens collected for rabies testing are to be considered as potentially infectious. Appropriate handling and shipping precautions should be taken in order to insure the safety of the collector/submitter, transport carriers, laboratory staff and the public in accordance with 49 CFR Department of Transportation Regulations.

- Wear disposable gloves, mask, and safety glasses or goggles when packaging rabies specimens.
- All specimens must be clearly labeled with animal identification number and species to match submission form.
  - Specimens must be triple packaged:
    1. A tightly sealed primary container (ziplock or heavy duty plastic bag with enough absorbent material to contain blood and body fluids)
    2. A sealed secondary container (heavy duty plastic bag, paint can or plastic pail with lid) with submission form (enclosed in sealed plastic bag) taped to secondary container
    3. A tightly sealed rigid outer container such as a cooler or thick-walled insulated box.
- **Pack outer container** with frozen cold packs to keep specimens cold and submit promptly to laboratory to reduce decomposition of animals. Do not use “wet” ice which may leak and cause sample rejection.
- **Frozen Specimens:** although frozen heads can be tested, they must be defrosted overnight before processing which will delay results.
- **Disinfect** the outside of container with freshly prepared 10% bleach or similar disinfectant to reduce risk of exposure to anyone handling package.
- **Seal** the shipping container, address the package and arrange for transport to:

**Fairfax County Health Dept. Lab  
 10777 Main Street, Suite 301  
 Fairfax, VA 22030  
 Attn: Rabies**